

wildlife ICELAND

Iceland Birding Adventures

Trip report

May and June 2016



Trip report compiled by tour leader Gaukur Hjartarson

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Summary

This report describes three different three to four days birdwatching tours in northern Iceland in summer of 2016. All tours are similar, including one day in Húsavík area with a whale-watching and birdwatching tour to Flatey island, one day at Langanes peninsula and one day at lake Mývatn and surroundings. One of the tour started with a short birdwatching in the vicinity of the hotel.

The first tour started on May 27th. Participants were three, Frantisek Pochmon (Czech Republic), Elda Louise Armstrong (USA) and Herbert Alan Armstrong (USA). The second tour started on June 3rd. Participants were Terry John Crabe (Canada), Cherylin Dawn Crabe (Canada), Johanna King (USA), Mike Brawley (USA), Irene Dadson (USA), Miles McEvoy (USA), Ami Greenberg (USA) and Carole Barnett (Canada). The last of the tours started on June 9th. Participants were Dave Bedford (Canada), Sharon Bedford (Canada), Lorne Bedford (Canada), Angela Bedford (Canada) and Robert Miller (USA).

Even though the guide prepares for rearranging days according to weather forecasts, there was no need for that this summer. One tour started with birdwatching on the way between the domestic airport to hotel, other tours started with birdwatching in Húsavík before the boat trip to Flatey island. The boat trip is on a fast RIB boat. The boat trip lasts 4-5 hours, including 1-2 hours stop in Flatey island. All boat trips included several good sightings of Humpback whales, Minke Whales were seen in two out of three trips and a magnificent Blue Whale was seen on June 10.

The trip to Langanes peninsula includes a lot of driving, more than 400 km, and some of it on a rough track to get to the final destination at the bird cliffs on Langanes peninsula. The trip does take more than 12 hours, even though it does not include lengthy walks. On the way to the cliffs there are several stops to look for birds and all in all the day is likely to yield close to 60 species of birds.

The last day includes a drive to Mývatn and around it. If time and road condition allows a visit to the most magnificent waterfall of Europe is possible. This summer the road was blocked by snow on May 30, but Dettifoss was visited on June 7 & 12. Lake Mývatn is a paradise for birdwatchers, and in fact one of Europe's greatest birding destination. It is best known for the extremely rich duck life, including Harlequin Ducks and Barrow's Goldeneyes.

Table 1 includes information on birds seen each day of the tours. The table includes color, where green color is for the Húsavík/Flatey tour, blue color is for the Langanes tour and the violet color is for the Lake Mývatn area trip. Other than that, red color shows the single short trip between the airport and the hotel. The table shows that 40-60 species of birds are seen on each of the three days described and during the three days number of bird species was 69-70 species for each group. All in all 75 bird species were seen in the three groups.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Annotated List of Birds recorded

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List.

Total species recorded: 75

DUCKS, GEESE, SWANS - Anatidae

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Greylag Geese are very common in Iceland and were seen all days in good numbers.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Pink-footed Geese are common in the area in April/May but much scarcer in June.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

One Barnacle Goose was seen at Öxarfjörður on June 5.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Whooper Swans are very common and easy to see and they were seen in good numbers every day of the trips.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Common Shelducks were seen in all visits to Flatey island. A single bird on May 28, a pair with 8 chicks on June 4 and a pair with 9 chicks on June 10. Two were seen at Öxarfjörður on May 29.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Gadwalls are rather common in the area and were seen most days of the trip.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Eurasian Wigeons are very common in the area and were seen in good numbers most days.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

American Wigeons are scarce visitor in Iceland, usually among their common Eurasian counterpart. A single drake, paired to a female Eurasian Wigeon, was seen in Reykjadalur on May 28 and June 3.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Mallard are widespread in Iceland and were seen all days in small numbers.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Northern Shovelers are the scarcest of the the regularly breeding ducks in Iceland with population of only few tens of pairs. Mývatn is their stronghold and some birds were seen in all visits in that area.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Northern Pintails were seen in small numbers each trip.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Some few Eurasian Teals were seen most days.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Tufted Duck is the common *Aythya* of Iceland. They were seen all days and often in good numbers.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

A single drake Ring-necked Duck was seen among Tufteds at Reykjahlíð, Mývatn on June 12. Ring-necked Ducks are uncommon vagrants in Iceland.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Greater Scaups are much less common than Tufted Ducks. Still, some were seen every day of the trips.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Common Eiders are very common at the coastline and on breeding grounds close to sea. They were seen in good numbers every day at the shoreline, but they are not likely inland at lake Mývatn.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Harlequin Ducks are common in the area, especially at Laxá river. Some were seen most days with excellent views in the vicinity of lake Mývatn.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Common Scoters are scarce breeding birds in Iceland, but almost all of them in this area. Some birds were seen all days.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

Long-tailed Ducks were seen in small numbers almost all days.

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

Barrow's Goldeneyes were seen almost all days, mostly at lake Mývatn and at Aðaldalur. In some cases at close ranges.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

A single drake Common Goldeneye was seen at Skjálftavatn, Kelduhverfi on May 29. Common Goldeneyes are well known winter visitors in Iceland, but are usually difficult to find in summertime.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

Common Mergansers are scarce nesting birds in the area. Some few were seen at Laxá river with all groups.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Red-breasted Mergansers were seen all days of the trip, even though in small numbers every day.

PHEASANTS & ALLIES - Phasianidae

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*

Some Ptarmigans were seen most days. They are usually easy to find in May, when the white males are showing on prominent spots, but in June they are on the other hand much more difficult to find.

LOONS - Gaviidae

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*

Some few Red-throated Loons were seen most days.

Great Northern Loon *Gavia immer*

Even though obviously scarcer than Red-throated Loons, Great Northern Loons were seen in most days.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

GREBES - Podicipedidae

Slavonian Grebe/Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

Some Slavonian Grebes are rather uncommon breeders in Iceland except at lake Mývatn and lake Víkingavatn where they are abundant. Some Slavonian Grebes were seen all days.

PETRELS & SHEARWATERS - Procellariidae

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Being one of the most numerous bird of Iceland, it was easy to find in good numbers almost everywhere along the coastline.

GANNETS & BOOBIES - Sulidae

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

The only land based breeding site of Northern Gannets is visited on Langanes where they nest by hundreds. There Gannets are easy to see at good range. Other than that a few were seen during whale watching trip.

CORMORANTS & SHAGS - Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Great Cormorants are quite tricky to find in this area and only four individuals were noted.

OYSTERCATCHERS - Haematopodidae

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Oystercatchers are common along the coastline and were seen in most days in some numbers. They are usually not found inland in this area.

PLOVERS - Charadriidae

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

European Golden Plovers are very common breeders in Iceland and were seen in some numbers every day of trip.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Common Ringed Plovers are common breeding birds in Iceland and some were seen every day of the trip.

SANDPIPERS & SNIPES - Scolopacidae

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common Snipes are very common in most all Iceland and were seen all days.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Black-tailed Godwits are rather common breeders in Iceland and some birds were seen all days.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Whimbrels are common breeders in Iceland and some birds were seen all days.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common Redshanks are common breeders in Iceland and some birds were seen all days.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Ruddy Turnstones do not breed in Iceland but are common on migration route towards more northerly breeding grounds in May and early June. Turnstones were seen all days along the coastline and sometimes in good numbers.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Red Knots do not breed in Iceland but are common on migration route towards more northerly breeding grounds in May and early June. Knots were seen most days along the coastline and sometimes in good numbers.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Sanderlings do not breed in Iceland but are common on migration route towards more northerly breeding grounds in late May and early June. Sanderlings were seen most days along the coastline and sometimes in good numbers.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

Purple Sandpipers were seen with all groups but always in small numbers.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Dunlins are common breeding birds in Iceland and many birds also visit on migration route towards more northerly breeding grounds in May and early June. Dunlins were seen most days along the coastline and sometimes in good numbers.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Red-necked Phalaropes are common breeding birds in Iceland some were seen most days of the trip with good numbers at lake Mývatn.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

A nice pair of Red Phalaropes was seen at June 10 in Flatey island. Red Phalaropes are one of the scarcest regularly nesting birds of Iceland and hence always a good find.

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS - Laridae

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Black-legged Kittiwakes are very numerous breeders in Iceland and some birds were seen all days spent at the coast.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Black-headed Gulls are common breeders in Iceland and some birds were seen all days of the trip.

Mew Gull *Larus canus*

Mew Gulls are rather uncommon breeders in Iceland. Some few were seen most days.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Even though Great Black-backed Gulls are declining in numbers in Iceland, they are still rather easy to find. Usually they are confined to the coast and scarce at lake Mývatn. Some GBbG's were seen most days of the trip.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

Glaucous Gulls are common in west Iceland, but rather uncommon in the northeast. Some few birds were seen most days spent at the coastline.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

Iceland Gulls are mostly winter visitors in Iceland, but immature birds linger well into June in some numbers. Some few Iceland Gulls were seen all days of the trips spent at the coastline.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

European Herring Gulls are the common large gulls of northern and eastern Iceland. Herring Gulls were seen almost all days of the trips.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Lesser Black-backed Gulls are common breeders in Iceland, particularly in the SW. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen every day of the trip.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Arctic Terns are one of these common breeding birds of Iceland that are hard to miss. They were seen in good numbers every day of the trip.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

A single individual of this scarce vagrant remained in a nesting colony of Arctic Terns at a site in Kelduhverfi most of the summer and that bird was seen in all trips.

SKUAS - Stercorariidae

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

Great Skuas were seen in small numbers most days spent at the coast. They are scarce inland.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Parasitic Jaegers were seen most days of the trips, but always in small numbers. Both all dark birds and pale birds were seen.

AUKS - Alcidae

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*

Three Thick-billed Murres were only seen at Langanes, in all trips.

Common Murre *Uria aalge*

Common Murres were seen both from the boat on the whale-watching trips and at the nesting site on Langanes peninsula.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Razorbills were seen in good numbers at nesting site on Langanes peninsula and three from the boat in whale-watching trip on June 10.

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*

Black Guillemots were only seen at Skjálfandi bay, at Húsavík harbour, Flatey island harbour and from the boat on the whale-watching trips.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

Atlantic Puffins were seen in good numbers from the whale-watching boat and at Flatey island. Fewer were seen at Langanes peninsula.

PIGEONS, DOVES - Columbidae

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Two Feral Pigeons were seen at the park in Húsavík on June 4.

OWLS - Strigidae

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Short-eared Owl was only seen once, a single individual at Tjörnes peninsula on May 29.

CARACARAS, FALCONS - Falconidae

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

Each group did get to see Merlins, but only one or two birds.

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*

Surprisingly Gyrfalcons are much easier to find than Merlins in NE-Iceland. Some Gyrs were seen most days of the trip.

CROWS, JAYS - Corvidae

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Ravens were seen all days of the trip in small numbers.

WRENS - Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Some few Wrens were seen most days, mostly at lake Mývatn and Ásbyrgi in Kelduhverfi.

THRUSHES - Turdidae

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Even though Common Blackbirds are becoming quite common in Iceland, especially in the SW, they were only seen twice, both observation at Húsavík were they nest in small numbers.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Redwing is the common thrush of Iceland and they were seen all days of the trip.

CHATS, OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS - Muscicapidae

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Northern Wheatears were seen in small numbers most days of the trips.

WAGTAILS, PIPITS - Motacillidae

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

White Wagtails are widespread and common birds in Iceland. They were seen all days of the trips.

Wildlife Iceland May & June 2016

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Meadow Pipit is the only pipit known to breed regularly in Iceland and it is very common. Meadow Pipits were seen all days of the trip.

FINCHES, EUPHONIAS - Fringillidae

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Common Redpolls were seen most days of the trips, with excellent views at a feeder in Húsavík visited in all trips.

Hoary Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*

A single bird was well seen among Common Redpolls at the feeder at Húsavík on June 10.

LONGSPURS, SNOW BUNTINGS - Calcariidae

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Snow Buntings were seen in small numbers in the NE at May 31, June 1 & June 2 with best views at Langanes peninsula.

Annotated List of Mammals Recorded

WOLVES, COYOTE, FOXES, JACKALS - Canidae

Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus*

No Arctic Fox was seen in the trips this time.

SEALS - Phocidae

Harbour Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Harbour Seals are quite common in the area and some were seen in trips.

RORQUALS - Balaenopteridae

Common Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

Minke Whales were seen in two of three whale-watching trips.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Some Humpback Whales were seen up close on all whale-watching trip at Skjálfandi (NE) bay.

Blue Whale *Balaenoptera musculus*

Blue Whales visit Skjálandi Bay most summers and are quite frequently seen in whale-watching trips. One was nicely seen on Three Humpback Whales were seen up close on all whale-watching trip at June 10.